Annex "A," Subparagraph 1h, Sociological Background

SOCIAL VALUES AND PATTERNS OF LIVING

In their basic features, the customs and ways of life of 183 177
the Magyar peasants differ little from those of the surrounding, chiefly Slavic, peoples. There has always been a comparatively free interchange of ideas in the Danube basin which has resulted in multilateral borrowing between the Magyars and other peoples. Superstition especially, most of them originating in primitive Weltanschauungen are common to most European peoples, and the Hungarian stock of superstitions has but a few features distinctly Magyar or Oriental.

Nevertheless, the language barrier between the Finno-Ugric Magyars and the neighboring Slavs has favored a certain acclimatization or adjustment in the development of Magyar forms of international motifs. Another force which also served to differentiate certain Magyar customs and beliefs was the Catholicism of the Magyars as opposed to the Orthodoxy of some of their neighbors.

The literature on Hungarian folk customs is quite voluminous 183 114
(the Magyarság Néprajza discusses fifteen customs and beliefs pertaining to nursing alone) and any attempt to summarize it is doomed to arbitrariness and incompleteness. On the other hand, this literature is merely descriptive and often lacks precision as to the local

183 distribution and the extent of penetration of the folkloric phenomena it discusses. The following pages will reflect the same lack.

183 The customs and beliefs of the Magyars, like those of other peoples, can be reduced to the necessities of life as their source; at their origin, they were highly utilitarian and aimed specifically at securing a plentiful crop and assuring the fertility of animals and human beings by means of appropriate actions which became customary through the ages. Upon the disappearance of the old beliefs underlying these actions, these customs were still observed as mere formalities until finally they disappeared altogether. Many Hungarian customs have disappeared in this manner or are in the process of disappearing, devoid of their original meaning. Some customs, however, received a new impetus with the spread of Christianity, which gave new meaning to the ancient forms. The social values and patterns of living of the Magyar peasants are, accordingly, based upon a mixture of customs which are respected either because "that's how my grandfather used to do it" or because they are believed to be pious and Christian actions, and no one but the folklorist realizes their hidden paganism.

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Magic and superstitions beliefs even today permeate the everyday lives of the Magyar peasants, and they have remained long after other aspects of their life have changed. They will go when urban culture and enlightenment have been adopted completely, but this is still for the future to demonstrate. It is reported that today the peasants who drive the tractors on the kolkhozes will not begin work without a little magical ritual which they learned from their fathers and which aims at assuring them a better crop.

Historically, the most important elements in Magyar folk customs are those which have their roots in primitive dramatic [585] performances and rites inspired by magical beliefs. These customs are full of dramatic symbolism as in the case of the bride who, when entering her husband's house for the first time, is seated and [844] a curly-haired baby is put in her lap. Women in difficult labor are prescribed per analogiam a walk around the trough. Some of these customs involve beating people, noise-making, feasts, competitions, fights and jumps deriving from ritual dances; e.g. in some communities the herdsmen have to pick up their yearly pay from the ground standing and jumping on one foot: this is supposed to

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789 insure that they and their animals remain brisk and alert. Another age-old ritual is the procession in celebration of the burial of winter which is still in existence today in its ancient form, although most processions now seem to have taken on ecclesiastical appearances. Another ritual performed frequently by the Magyars is the custom of walking around a person or object feared, making thus a magic circle; for example, an accused person tries to walk around the state's witnesses before his trial begins.

[372] There is an important group of folk customs which center around fire and water. Fire is a chief element in many customs aiming at the warding off of evil forces and purification. In particular, the customs connected with quarterly celebrations feature fire in some form. There are places in Hungary where the fire for the Easter Sunday "burning of Pilate" is lit with flint instead of matches or even more primitive methods such as rubbing together two sticks of wood. Ceremonial water is in many cases now holy water brought from the church.

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755 In the peasant's spiritual life, religion and superstitions are inseparable. The following random examples illustrate well this